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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/SPG, S/E WILLIAMSON
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON

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SUBJECT: AL-SAMANI: NEW EMBASSY COMPOUND POLITICAL ISSUE, NOT SECURITY

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: In a sometimes tense meeting with Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (PDAS) Linda Greenfield-Thomas on January 12, State Minister for Foreign Affairs al-Samani al-Wasila maintained that construction on the new embassy compound (NEC) had been blocked in response to political, bilateral issues as well as reciprocity for difficulties Sudanese Embassy staff in Washington faced, while PDAS countered that the compound was a security issue and must be discussed separately. Al-Samani also asserted that the Sudanese government was not hampering UNAMID deployment and that the UN was projecting their failures onto the Sudanese Government. PDAS was accompanied by CDA Fernandez and representatives from SPG and USAID. End summary.

NEW EMBASSY COMPOUND A RECIPROCITY ISSUE

12. (C) Expressing his condolences on the New Year's Day killings of USAID employees John Granville and Abdul Rahman Abbas, al-Samani assured PDAS that the investigation would soon be complete. PDAS thanked him for his government's cooperation, saying after the tragedy it was more important than ever to build a safe, secure embassy in Khartoum. The U.S. and Sudan needed to urgently work together on this, she said, noting that almost USD 60 million had been spent on its construction so far. The U.S. needed Sudanese assurances that the project would move forward, she said, but she would also face the large task of convincing Washington that these assurances - if secured - were valid and true.

13. (C) An unusually scripted Al-Samani took issue with PDAS' linking of the recent murders to security concerns. Several times suggesting that the murders were isolated incidents of street crime, or possibly even resulted from a breach of safety protocol by the victims. The embassy containers were being blocked out of reciprocity, he said, claiming that during his and Finance Minister Zubair's recent visits to Washington, they had not received useful cooperation on matters of concern to them. "We need dialogue with you," he said. Issues like Abyei needed encouragement, not pressure, and the Abyei Commission was suffering from U.S.-imposed sanctions. "You should move towards us," he said. Sudan was an African amalgam, he asserted, and shared tribal ties with all its nine neighbors. Peace and stability in Sudan meant increased peace and stability in the region, he said, which is very much in American interests.

14. (C) PDAS cautioned al-Samani to separate the issue of the new embassy compound from political, bilateral issues. The U.S. needed to provide a secure work environment for its staff, she argued. CDA pointed out that the embassy containers had been blocked well before the 2007 sanctions were imposed. PDAS invited al-Samani to visit the embassy so he could himself see the squalid, unsafe working conditions. Al-Samani countered, saying the Sudanese Embassy in Washington had difficulties with its banking privileges, and other issues, that needed to be resolved as well. Additionally, he said, people in Sudan were asking what the Americans "were up to" by building such a large compound in Khartoum. The bilateral relationship must be based on reciprocity at all levels, he said. CDA argued that the Sudanese government was effectively holding the new embassy hostage to the bilateral relationship.

15. (C) PDAS continued to stress that new embassy was a security matter, not a political one. The new compound also benefited the Sudanese, she said, who could then reopen the main road in front of the current embassy building. "We have worse relations with other countries where we are not prevented from having a secure, healthy work environment," she told al-Samani. But the Sudanese government provided security to the embassy, al-Samani argued. USAID Mission Director Pat Fleuret also pointed out the benefits of a secure work environment for Americans, saying that it would allow him to bring in the kinds of experts he needed to accomplish real development work in Darfur and the rest of the country. Al-Samani seemed to agree, saying, "We need to break this circle." The Sudanese wanted U.S. presence in Sudan for the long term, he added.

SUDANESE NOT TO BLAME FOR UNAMID DELAYS

16. (C) Turning to Darfur, al-Samani said that UNAMID should bring all the African troops into the country before any others. PDAS argued that

17. (C) The Sudanese government was also not delaying finalizing the SOFA, al-Samani said; the government had agreed that the old SOFA could be used until December 31, 2007, but no new terms had been proposed. The GOS had scheduled three separate meetings with the UN which had been blown off by the UN. The issue of night flights was also exaggerated, he said. The airports in Darfur were not suitable for night flights, he said, and the government had offered UNAMID the alternate option of using Khartoum and El Obeid airports or fixing the local ones. PDAS told al-Samani that she hoped that some of these issues could be resolved by the time the new U.S. special envoy arrived for his first visit to Sudan.

18. (C) Comment: Al-Samani, usually a more convivial

interlocutor, seemed well-rehearsed for the meeting. His assertion that many Sudanese are suspicious of the large, hi-tech proposed new embassy is likely accurate; this combined with the tit-for-tat strategy being implemented by the Ministry of Finance and others may mean that the issue will be difficult to separate from political concerns in the strained bilateral relationship. His view of UNAMID is not entirely wrong - both the GOS and UNAMID blame each other for delays and both are right. End comment.

9 (U) PDAS Thomas-Greenfield did not have a chance to clear this cable before her departure.
FERNANDEZ